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ARTICLE

## **Anarcheology and the Emergence of the Alethurgic Subject in Foucault's *On the Government of the Living***

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**ABSTRACT.** *On the Government of the Living* plays a pivotal role in the evolution of Foucault's thought because it constitutes a "laboratory" in which he forges the methodological and conceptual tools—such as the notions of anarcheology and alethurgy (or, better, what I call here the "alethurgic subject")—necessary to carry on his study of governmentality independently from his *History of Sexuality* project. In this paper, I argue that Foucault's projects of an anarcheology of the government of human beings through the manifestation of truth in the form of subjectivity and of a genealogy of the subject of desire, albeit essentially linked to one another, are conceptually autonomous. These projects are both part of a genealogy of the modern subject but should be treated independently insofar as it is the former, elaborated in *On the Government of the Living*, that provides us with the key to understanding Foucault's interest in the care of the self and *parrhesia* as an integral part of his analyses of governmentality and the critical attitude from the late 1970s.

**Keywords:** Avowal, Governmentality, History of Sexuality, Subjectivity, Truth

### INTRODUCTION

Since its publication in 2012, Michel Foucault's 1980 lecture course at the Collège de France, *On the Government of the Living*,<sup>1</sup> has attracted quite a lot of attention, mostly due to the widespread acknowledgement of the pivotal role it plays in the evolution of Foucault's thought.<sup>2</sup> Many scholars see in these lectures the beginning of the so-called

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Du gouvernement des vivants: Cours au Collège de France (1979-1980)* (2012), hereafter abbreviated GV / *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979-1980* (2014), hereafter abbreviated GL.

<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, the interest in these lectures has so far been largely limited to Foucauldian scholarship, with the exception of Foucault's analysis of the notion of "regimes of truth," which has attracted wider attention. See, e.g., Leonardo Rinaldi, "On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979-1980 [Book Review]," *Social and Environmental Accountability Journal* 36:1 (2016). On this topic, see Daniele Lorenzini, "What is a 'Regime of Truth'?", *Le Foucauldien* 1:1 (2015).

“final Foucault,” as they contain the first, fully developed elaboration of “the third key dimension to Foucault’s work: namely, the dimension of subjectivity.”<sup>3</sup>

There is, however, an important interpretive question that has so far passed virtually unnoticed. As Michel Senellart rightly observed when editing these lectures,<sup>4</sup> *GL* presents an extensive discussion of a series of early Christian authors (from Tertullian to Cassian) and of topics (from baptism and canonical penance to self-examination and exhaustive avowal) which, as we now know for certain, also constitute the backbone of Foucault’s arguments in the first chapter of the fourth volume of his *History of Sexuality, Les aveux de la chair*.<sup>5</sup> Yet, sexuality or, better, the emergence of the “flesh” in early Christianity are virtually absent from *GL*, whose general framework is rather defined by the notion of the “government of human beings through the manifestation of truth in the form of subjectivity” (*GV*, 79/*GL*, 80). The project of offering a genealogical—or “anarcheological” (*GV*, 77-78/*GL*, 79)—analysis of this notion, although connected to the main aim of the second, third, and fourth volumes of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, that is, retracing a genealogy of the “subject of desire,”<sup>6</sup> is nevertheless clearly broader than the latter. How can we account for both the analogies and the differences between these two projects? Should we say that they are correlative, such that one can only be understood in light of the other, and vice versa? Or should we grant each of them a relative independence?

In this paper, I argue that these two projects, albeit essentially linked to one another in Foucault’s work, are—and should be treated as—conceptually autonomous. They are strictly connected because they both consist in exploring different ways in which the relations between subjectivity and truth have been conceived of in our society, and can therefore both be situated in the general framework of a “genealogy of the modern subject.”<sup>7</sup> However, they should also each be treated independently insofar as it is the “anarcheological” study of the government of human beings through truth that provides us with the key to understanding Foucault’s interest in the care of the self and *parrhesia* as an integral part of (and not a rupture with) his analyses of “governmentality” and the “critical attitude” from the late 1970s.<sup>8</sup> It is only by emphasizing this fundamental continuity that we can make sense of Foucault’s last three lecture courses at the Collège de France, as well as his project to publish, after *Les aveux de la chair*, a book on *The Government of Self and Others*, which was not part of the *History of Sexuality* series. Thus, if *GL* does play a pivotal role in the evolution of Foucault’s thought, I argue it is because it

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard E. Harcourt, “Introducing *On the Government of the Living*,” *Foucault 13/13*, 7 February 2016. See also Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, “On the Government of the Living [Book Review],” *The Review of Politics* 77:4 (2015), 683.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Senellart, “Situation du cours,” in *GV*, 343-349 / “Course Context,” in *GL*, 342-345.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair: Histoire de la sexualité* 4 (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality* [1984] (1985), 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Lectures at Dartmouth College, 1980* (2015), 21.

<sup>8</sup> On the continuity between Foucault’s definition of the critical attitude and his study of ancient *parrhesia*, see Sverre Raffnsøe, Morten S. Thaning, and Marius Gudmand-Høyer, “Philosophical Practice as Self-Modification: An Essay on Michel Foucault’s Critical Engagement with Philosophy,” *Foucault Studies* 25 (2018).

constitutes a “laboratory” in which Foucault elaborates the methodological and conceptual tools—such as the notions of anarcheology and alethurgy (or, better, what I call the “alethurgic subject”)—necessary to carry on and develop, albeit in a modified form, his study of governmentality and the critical attitude *independently* from his *History of Sexuality* project.

## TWO METHODOLOGICAL SHIFTS

One of the most commonly held views about *GL* is that it marks the beginning of the last “phase” (the “ethical phase”) of Foucault’s intellectual career insofar as it introduces the third, crucial dimension of his work: in addition to knowledge and power, Foucault is now also interested in the subject. Yet, as Bernard Harcourt rightly argues, this does not mean that the problematic of the subject was absent from Foucault’s previous work. The suggestion is rather that this problematic now takes “central stage” as “a way to elaborate a three-dimensional theory of knowledge-power-subjectivity in furtherance of an overall ‘history of truth.’”<sup>9</sup> This claim still stands in need of some clarification, however, because the emergence of the subject as a fundamental dimension of Foucault’s work is presented, in *GL*, as a consequence of two major methodological shifts: from the notion of power to the notion of government, and from the notion of knowledge (*savoir*) to the problem of truth.<sup>10</sup>

On the one hand, Foucault argues that he already accomplished the first of these shifts at the end of the 1970s in *Security, Territory, Population*<sup>11</sup> and *The Birth of Biopolitics*,<sup>12</sup> where he elaborated the notion of power in the direction of government understood “in the broad sense [...] of mechanisms and procedures intended to conduct human beings, to direct their conduct, to conduct their conduct” (*GV*, 14/*GL*, 12).<sup>13</sup> It is important to emphasize here that, far from marking a radical rupture with his previous analyses of disciplinary and biopolitical power,<sup>14</sup> the notion of government constitutes for Foucault a way to clarify and develop them. It also allows him to implicitly respond to a well-known objection: in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault famously claims that “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”<sup>15</sup> If this is true, however—so the objection goes—is resistance not ultimately pointless, insofar as we are always “trapped” in a net of power relations? It is precisely in order to answer this objection that Foucault

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<sup>9</sup> Harcourt, “Introducing *On the Government of the Living*.”

<sup>10</sup> For a critical discussion of these two shifts, see Jean L. Cohen, “Reflections by Jean L. Cohen,” *Foucault 13/13*, 7 February 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (2007).

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (2008).

<sup>13</sup> On this point, see also the two previous articles in this special issue on *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

<sup>14</sup> The topic of the government of human beings and the notion of an “art of governing” had already been introduced by Foucault in 1975, precisely in the context of an analysis of disciplinary power and its normalizing function. See Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (2003), 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* [1976] (1978), 95.

elaborates the notion of “governmentality,”<sup>16</sup> thus inaugurating the project of a genealogy of the government of human beings which will lead him, from the study of the *raison d’État* and the liberal and neoliberal arts of government between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries, to go back not only to Medieval “pastoral power” and “counter-conducts”<sup>17</sup> but also to early Christianity and Greco-Roman antiquity. But how exactly does the notion of governmentality allow Foucault to respond to the aforementioned objection?

In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault addresses the threefold meaning of the concept of “conduct,” which he takes to be coextensive with that of government: (1) one conducts or governs someone else; conversely, (2) one is conducted or governed by someone else; but (3) one also conducts or governs *oneself*.<sup>18</sup> The domain of “ethics,” as Foucault defines it (that is, as the elaboration of a certain relationship to oneself), is inaugurated in this moment.<sup>19</sup> Two years later, in his lectures at Dartmouth College, Foucault argues:

The contact point, where the way individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call, I think, government. Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself.<sup>20</sup>

The analytic of power relations developed in *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, among others, now appears to Foucault to be too narrowly focused on (disciplinary and biopolitical) “techniques of domination,” as if government could be *reduced* to the operations of conducting the conduct of *others*. This risks suggesting that power is nothing but “pure violence or strict coercion,” whereas Foucault thinks that it consists in “complex relations,” and that “these relations involve a set of rational techniques” whose efficiency “is due to a subtle integration of coercion-technologies and self-technologies.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, the problem that Foucault was facing in 1976—how can resistance be possible if it is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power?—now appears to be misplaced. The dimension of “government” encompasses *both* techniques of domination and techniques of the self, emphasizing their contact point and the specific ways in which techniques aimed at conducting others and techniques aimed at conducting oneself *interact*. The issue is therefore no longer “how to resist power” but “how to be governed *otherwise*,” that is, how to *transform* the interplay between—and the

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<sup>16</sup> Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 108-110.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-226.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>19</sup> On this topic, see Arnold I. Davidson, “In Praise of Counter-Conduct,” *History of the Human Sciences* 24:4 (2011).

<sup>20</sup> Foucault, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self*, 25-26.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

respective strategic importance of—techniques of coercion and techniques of the self in any given situation, in order to counteract the effects of domination as much as possible.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, however, this shift from power to government is not enough. In *GL*, Foucault claims that it has to be complemented with a second shift—from the notion of knowledge (*savoir*) to the problem of truth (*GV*, 14/*GL*, 12). What does he mean by this? Even though it is not immediately clear, I think that Foucault wants to emphasize that the procedures through which truth is obtained and manifested—what he calls “alethurgy,” that is, “the manifestation of truth as the set of possible verbal or non-verbal procedures by which one brings to light what is laid down as true as opposed to false, hidden, inexpressible, unforeseeable, or forgotten” (*GV*, 8/*GL*, 7)—are far more numerous and multifaceted than we usually concede. This is a point that Foucault already makes in his lectures at the Collège de France on *Psychiatric Power*, where he traces a “little history of truth in general” aiming to show that “truth-demonstration,” that is, scientific or “objective” knowledge, is just one of the many ways in which truth can be obtained and manifested.<sup>23</sup> Truth-demonstration is but one of the possible forms taken by truth, provided that we define truth as an “event”:

I would like [...], on the one hand, to show how this truth-demonstration, broadly identified in its technology with scientific practice, the present day extent, force and power of which there is absolutely no point in denying, derives in reality from the truth-ritual, truth-event, truth-strategy, and how truth-knowledge is basically only a region and an aspect, albeit one that has become superabundant and assumed gigantic dimensions, but still an aspect or a modality of truth as event and of the technology of this truth-event.<sup>24</sup>

Utilizing the notion of alethurgy instead of that of truth-event, Foucault makes exactly the same point at the beginning of *GL*: “What we call knowledge (*connaissance*), that is to say, the production of truth in the consciousness of individuals by logico-experimental procedures, is only one of the possible forms of alethurgy” (*GV*, 8-9/*GL*, 7). The manifestation of truth “is much more than making known (*donner à connaître*)” (*GV*, 73/*GL*, 75). Thus, even though Foucault does not explicitly acknowledge it, it is clear that, as in the case of the shift from power to government, the shift from knowledge to truth is a way to clarify and widen the scope of his previous analyses rather than to mark a radical break with them. The crucial methodological principle that Foucault formulates in *GL*—one that underpins most of his work in the 1980s—is that human beings cannot be governed “without carrying out operations in the domain of truth, and operations that are always in excess of what is useful and necessary to govern in an effective way” (*GV*, 18/*GL*, 17).

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<sup>22</sup> See Foucault’s definition of critique as “the art of not being governed quite so much” in Michel Foucault, “Qu’est-ce que la critique?” [1978], in *Qu’est-ce que la critique? suivi de La culture de soi*, ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (2015), 37. On this topic, see also Daniele Lorenzini, “From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude: Michel Foucault and the Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much,” *Foucault Studies* 21 (2016).

<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-1974* (2006), 235-236.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

The relations between government and truth are therefore much older, and much deeper, than the focus on the modern link between “an art of government and, let’s say, political, economic, and social rationality” may lead us to think (GV, 18/GL, 17). Foucault’s genealogy of the government of human beings relies precisely on the postulate that *no* government—*no* “hegemony”—is possible without alethurgy, that is, without a manifestation of truth that cannot be reduced to a series of rational or objective instances of knowledge (GV, 8-9/GL, 7). Thus, if it is true that, in *GL*, the subject emerges as a third, fundamental dimension of Foucault’s work, it does so within a transformed framework that should more precisely be described as *a three-dimensional genealogical exploration of truth-government-subjectivity*.

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE ALETHURGIC SUBJECT

The dimension of subjectivity is introduced in *GL* by way of Foucault’s claim that the form of government of human beings which has historically characterized our society relies on a specific form of alethurgy: “the manifestation of truth in the form of subjectivity” (GV, 79/GL, 80). Thus, as Foucault clearly argues, “it is this whole history of the relations between *autos* [the first person, the ‘I’ –DL] and alethurgy, between the myself and truth-telling that interests me in the history of the truth in the West” (GV, 49/GL, 50). “Government” requires “a truth that manifests itself, at least in certain of its points, but absolutely indispensably, in the form of subjectivity” (GV, 73/GL, 74-75). Therefore, it is *as a consequence* of the two aforementioned methodological shifts, and more specifically of the second one, that the theme of subjectivity takes central stage in the work of the “final Foucault,” and not vice versa.

This is particularly evident in the way in which Foucault (re)defines the notion of “regime of truth” in *GL*. When he first introduces this notion in the mid-1970s, he justifies it on the basis of the essential link he establishes between power and knowledge: truth, he argues, is connected “by a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it.”<sup>25</sup> A regime of truth is the strategic field within which truth is produced and becomes a tactical element for the functioning of power relations in any given society. However, since Foucault moves away from the power-knowledge framework in *GL*, he also modifies his definition of a regime of truth. Given that he now wants to focus on the relations between government and alethurgy, and notably alethurgy in the form of subjectivity, Foucault redefines a regime of truth as “that which determines the obligations of individuals with regard to the procedures of manifestation of truth” (GV, 91/GL, 93). This new definition, unsurprisingly, revolves around the role of individuals in the alethurgic procedures, thus situating the subject at the very core of the governmental mechanisms that Foucault wants to study.

In the concluding remarks of the last lecture of *GL*, Foucault claims that his analysis of the Christian practices of baptism, penance, and spiritual direction (*direction de conscience*)

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<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Political Function of the Intellectual” [1976], *Radical Philosophy* 17 (1977), 14.

provides us with a genealogy of the techniques utilized in our society in order to establish “a relationship between subjectivity and truth,” that is, to link “the obligation of truth and subjectivity” in increasingly complex and tight ways (*GV*, 305/*GL*, 311). In particular, the obligation to avow, to tell the truth about oneself, which defines Christian *exagoreusis*, constitutes an injunction that, according to Foucault, has never ceased to characterize our society as a whole: “We are obliged to speak of ourselves in order to tell the truth of ourselves” (*GV*, 305/*GL*, 311). In other words, one of the main alethurgic forms that characterizes the “Western” regime of truth requires the subject to perpetually put herself—her thoughts, her desires, her fears, etc.—into discourse, and the establishment of this linkage between subjectivity and truth turns out to be essential for the existence and functioning of a specific kind of government of human beings. It is, Foucault concludes, “one of the basic forms of our obedience” (*GV*, 307/*GL*, 313).

The crucial role that avowal plays in the history of our society, as well as in the development of their power-knowledge apparatuses, is of course already a major theme of Foucault’s work in the 1970s.<sup>26</sup> Two moments deserve to be emphasized here. First, avowal and the transformation of the “Western” subject into a “confessing animal” are central to Foucault’s project of tracing a history of sexuality from the very beginning.<sup>27</sup> As he argues in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*:

The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, it is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, “demands” only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weights it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. Confession frees, power reduces one to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom: traditional themes in philosophy, which a “political history of truth” would have to overturn by showing that truth is not by nature free—nor error servile—but that its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power. The confession is an example of this.<sup>28</sup>

Here, Foucault is mostly concerned with rejecting the “repressive hypothesis” by showing that sexuality is not something that has been reduced to silence but something that we have never ceased to talk about.<sup>29</sup> However, in the series of lectures on the history of

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<sup>26</sup> Stuart Elden, *Foucault’s Last Decade* (2016), 71-78, 112-133.

<sup>27</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 59. See also Foucault, *Abnormal*, 167-194, as well as the lecture course delivered at the University of São Paulo in the fall of 1975: Michel Foucault, “Cours de São Paulo” [1975], Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fonds Michel Foucault (NAF 28730), box no. 56; to be published in *La généalogie du savoir moderne sur la sexualité* [working title], ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (in preparation). In São Paulo, Foucault claims that his aim is to trace the “genealogy of *scientia sexualis*, that is to say, the analysis of the Western discourse on sexual pleasure based on the obligation to avow it” — a project that he also refers to in terms of an “archeology of avowal.”

<sup>28</sup> *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 60.

<sup>29</sup> In an unpublished manuscript, most likely from 1976, Foucault argues that, in order to get rid of the “repressive schema,” we must be at the same time a bit of a sophist (since “the sophists are those who, against Plato and Socrates, asserted the entanglement of power and knowledge relations”), a bit of a Machiavelli (since “Machiavelli, against the emerging juridism, analyzed power as an exercise and calculation of force

sexuality that he gave at the University of São Paulo in the fall of 1975, Foucault more intriguingly claims that his interest in the techniques of “sexual avowal” derives from the fact that they entail a form of “individualization” that is different from the disciplinary one. While the latter takes the form of an “inspection” (“a power which is mute, external, classifying, and operating on multiplicities”), the individualization put in the service of the “control of sexuality” is “exegetical, interpretative, discursive,” and it gives rise to what Foucault calls “hermeneutic individuality” —whose emergence he still traces to the modern period, that is, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>30</sup> One could therefore legitimately argue that Foucault’s interest in the genealogy of avowal originates in his project of a history of sexuality and is thus linked to the power-knowledge framework that also characterizes his 1976 definition of a regime of truth.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, with the redefinition of this conceptual framework in terms of a study of the government of human beings through truth, Foucault’s genealogical analysis of the practice of avowal takes on a new and broader meaning —as it is already clear in *Security, Territory, Population*. This is the second moment that I would like to emphasize. When analyzing the Christian pastorate in *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault discusses the Christian practice of spiritual direction, opposing it to the Greco-Roman one: while the latter aims to create an autonomous subject who no longer needs to be directed by someone else, the Christian practice of spiritual direction relies on a form of absolute obedience to the other and entails “a mode of individualization that not only does not take place by way of affirmation of the self, but one that entails destruction of the self.”<sup>32</sup> Such mode of individualization thus creates a subjugated subject (*sujet assujetti*), and does so precisely through “the production of an internal, secret, and hidden truth” that the individual must verbalize permanently as it constitutes “the element through which the pastor’s power is exercised.”<sup>33</sup>

As these ideas will be taken up again and elaborated in more detail in *GL*,<sup>34</sup> there is an undeniable continuity between Foucault’s reflections on the avowal-individualization link in the 1970s and his analyses of the alethurgy-government-subjectivity link in the 1980s.<sup>35</sup> In his texts and lectures from the 1970s, however, Foucault’s attention is still focused *exclusively* on the production of a truth about oneself as a means that allows for a certain kind of power to be exercised — as a tool utilized in order to control the subject and

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relations”), and a bit of a Nietzsche (since “Nietzsche traced the twin and reciprocal genealogies of the will to truth and the will to power”). See Michel Foucault, “La notion de repression,” Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fonds Michel Foucault (NAF 28730), box “Cours 1975-1976, ‘Il faut défendre la société’”; to be published in *La généalogie du savoir moderne sur la sexualité*.

<sup>30</sup> Foucault, “Cours de São Paulo.”

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Sophie Fuggle, “Review of Michel Foucault’s *On the Government of the Living*,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, 12 August 2015.

<sup>32</sup> *Security, Territory, Population*, 180.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-184.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., *GV*, 156-158, 224-241, 264-269, 283-284, 298-303/*GL*, 159-161, 229-246, 270-275, 288-289, 304-309.

<sup>35</sup> On the important role that avowal plays in Foucault’s genealogy of liberal and neoliberal governmentality, see Gordon Hull, “Confessing Preferences: What Foucault’s *Government of the Living* Can Tell Us about Neoliberalism and Big Data,” *SSRN*, 19 December 2016.

make her more obedient. By contrast, the methodological and conceptual shifts that take place in *GL* open up to Foucault the possibility of conceiving of *different* kinds of relation between truth-telling about oneself and the government of human beings—as his study of the Greco-Roman care of the self and ancient *parrhesia* clearly shows. Foucault’s aim is now to draw an outline for a history of truth

from the point of view of acts of subjectivity, or of the subject’s relationship to himself, understood not only as a relationship of self-knowledge, but as a relationship of exercise of self on self, elaboration of self by self, transformation of self by self, that is to say, the relations between the truth and what we call spirituality, or again: truth act and ascesis, truth act and experience in the full and strong sense of the term, that is to say, experience as that which qualifies the subject, enlightens it about itself and about the world and, at the same time, transforms it. (*GV*, 111-112/*GL*, 115)

Thus, whereas the power-knowledge framework only allowed Foucault to interpret the production of a “true” discourse about oneself as a coercive mechanism aiming to obtain obedience and submission, the new methodological and conceptual framework he inaugurates in *GL* allows him to realize that some practices of truth-telling, far from producing subjection, can be interpreted as instances of the “critical attitude”—a notion that, already in 1978, Foucault defines in relation to the three dimensions of truth, power, and the subject.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it is this same framework that Foucault utilizes at the beginning of his 1982 lecture course at the Collège de France, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, when he distinguishes “philosophy” from “spirituality,” and links his analysis of the Greco-Roman care of the self to the latter.<sup>37</sup> Analogously, in 1983, Foucault claims *both* that what is at stake in his study of the evolution of *parrhesia* from its “democratic” form to the emergence of “the theme of the prince’s advisor” is “the genealogy of the art of governing,”<sup>38</sup> and that his overarching aim in exploring the ancient notion of *parrhesia* is “to outline the genealogy of what we could call the critical attitude in our society.”<sup>39</sup> Of course, we can only make sense of these claims in light of the methodological shifts that took place in *GL*, opening up to Foucault the possibility of simultaneously addressing the government of others and the government of oneself. At the same time, the critical attitude is here no longer defined in purely negative or “reactive” terms—that is, as a *counter-conduct* or the art of *not* being governed *like that*—but acquires a positive, “active” meaning. The parrhesiast, for instance, is someone who actively governs herself in a certain way, shaping her *bios* so that she is capable of telling uncomfortable truths to others, thus exerting a critical function—in short, someone for whom critique really becomes a “virtue.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Foucault, “Qu’est-ce que la critique?,” 37, 39.

<sup>37</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982* (2005), 15-16.

<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-1983* (2010), 197, footnote \*.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discourse and Truth* [1983] (2019), 63.

<sup>40</sup> “Qu’est-ce que la critique?,” 35. On this topic, see Judith Butler, “What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue,” in *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. Sara Salih and Judith Butler (2004).

Consequently, the dimension of subjectivity is not just “added” by Foucault to the previous power-knowledge pair. To be exact, the subject *already* constitutes a fundamental dimension of Foucault’s work in the 1970s, defining a three-dimensional approach of knowledge-power-subjectivity which, however, turned out to be not entirely satisfactory. What emerges in *GL* through the double methodological shift from the notion of knowledge to the problem of truth, and from the issue of power to the question of government, is thus—I argue—not simply *the* dimension of subjectivity but a *specific form* of subjectivity. The subject, in the work of the “final Foucault,” is no longer just an *effect* of the interplay between power mechanisms and knowledge procedures but the support (and the “battlefield”) that *makes possible* the operations of “government through truth” in all of its dimensions: to govern someone else, to be governed by someone else, and to govern oneself. Therefore, it is only starting from *GL* that the subject acquires the *conceptual autonomy* it never had in Foucault’s previous works. At the same time, the subject does not emerge in *GL* as a general or universal concept but as a very *specific* entity: an entity who is capable of governing itself and being governed by others through specific alethurgic strategies.

What is the relationship between the fact of being subject in a relation of power and a subject through which, for which, and regarding which the truth is manifested? What is this double sense of the word “subject,” subject in a relation of power, subject in a manifestation of truth? (*GV*, 79/*GL*, 81)

The subject that lies at the heart of the work of the “final Foucault,” from his analysis of the early Christian practice of avowal to his study of the Greco-Roman techniques of the self, is thus what I would call an “alethurgic subject.” This alethurgic subject is the correlate of the problem of the government (of self and others) through truth as Foucault first formulates it in *GL*.

## THE ANARCHEOLOGICAL ATTITUDE

The guiding hypothesis that underpins most of Foucault’s work from 1980 to 1984 can be summarized in the claim that our society, in the course of its millennial history, has organized a complex system of relations between the government of human beings, the manifestation of the truth in the form of subjectivity, and the promise of “salvation” for each and all. But why is it that “power cannot be exercised without truth having to manifest itself [...] in the form of subjectivity,” and without “an expectation of effects of this manifestation of the truth in the form of subjectivity that go beyond the realm of knowledge, effects that belong to the realm of the salvation and deliverance of each and all” (*GV*, 73-74/*GL*, 75)?

To respond to this question, unsurprisingly, Foucault refuses to develop an analysis in terms of ideology. Thus, instead of addressing Christianity—and the elaboration, by the Church Fathers, of a series of “truth obligations”—from the point of view of ideology, Foucault claims that he wants to study Christianity as a “regime of truth” (*GV*, 91/*GL*, 93). This means that he does not want to argue that “inasmuch as human beings worry more

about salvation in the other world than about what happens down here, inasmuch as they want to be saved, they remain quiet and peaceful and it is easier to govern them" (GV, 74/GL, 75). By contrast, Foucault's aim is to develop what he calls an "(an)archeology of knowledge," focusing on "the types of relations that link together manifestations of truth with their procedures and the subjects who are their operators, witnesses, or possibly objects" — a type of analysis, in other words, which refuses to establish a clear-cut division between "scientific" knowledge and "ideologies" (GV, 97-98/GL, 100). Science, Foucault argues, is but a regime of truth among many others.

Is Foucault suggesting that science and religion are at bottom the same thing, that it does not matter whether we base our beliefs on one or the other? This is not exactly Foucault's point. The point is rather that an analysis in terms of regimes of truth allows us to emphasize that *both* Christianity and modern science are characterized by specific ways "of linking the manifestation of truth and the subject who carries it out" (GV, 98/GL, 100), and that in *both* cases, albeit of course in different forms, this link functions as a fundamental support for operations in the domain of the government of human beings. In short, Foucault wants us to take *seriously* the early Christian texts that he discusses and not to dismiss them as "ideology" by opposing them to "true" (scientific) knowledge. Foucault's anarcheological investigation aims precisely to study the multiple ways in which people have been and still are governed through truth, that is, the different ways in which they have accepted and still accept that a given set of truths — religious, cultural, scientific, medical, etc. — exert on them a certain "force" capable of conducting their conduct:

This type of history will not therefore be devoted to the way in which truth succeeds in tearing itself from the false and breaking all the ties in which it is held, but will be devoted [...] to the force of truth and to the ties by which human beings have gradually bound themselves in and through the manifestation of truth. Basically, what I would like to do [...] is write a history of the force of truth, a history of the power of the truth, a history, therefore, to take the same idea from a different angle, of the will to know. (GV, 98-99/GL, 101)

It seems to me that scholars have generally failed to notice that this methodological perspective builds on the ideas that Foucault already developed in "What is Critique?": the anarcheology of knowledge is not a theory but the instantiation of an "attitude"<sup>41</sup> relying on the claim that "no power, of whatever kind, is obvious or inevitable," that no power has any "intrinsic legitimacy" (GV, 76/GL, 77-78). Foucault's methodological standpoint here is thus not merely descriptive but is predicated upon a *critical attitude* defined by "the movement of freeing oneself from power," of wanting to be governed otherwise, rather than by a decision about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a given form of power resting on a "critique of representations in terms of truth or error, truth or falsity,

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<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, the English translation here reads "standpoint" instead of "attitude" (GV, 76/GL, 77), thus obscuring the obvious connection with the notion of "critical attitude" that Foucault coined two years earlier in "What is Critique?".

ideology or science" (GV, 76/GL, 77). It is an *anarcheology*, then, not because it relies on the "anarchic" postulate that power is intrinsically bad and that we should therefore strive to obtain a society without power relations (Foucault rejects both of these ideas) but because it shares with anarchy—and with Paul Feyerabend's anarchist epistemology<sup>42</sup>—a theoretical-practical attitude based on "the non-acceptability of power" and the questioning of "all the ways in which power is in actual fact accepted" (GV, 76-77/GL, 78). In other words, even though Foucault does not think that power is *bad* in itself, he does believe that it is always possible to criticize a given form or exercise of power, and always legitimate to ask if it would be better to be governed otherwise. Consequently, Foucault's anarcheology of the government of human beings through truth is essentially defined by "a theoretical-practical attitude concerning the non-necessity of all power" (GV, 77/GL, 78).

Although Foucault never utilizes the term in *GL*, and *contra* Jeremy Carrette,<sup>43</sup> it is clear that this historical investigation is also a form of genealogy.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, if it is true that Foucault's initial definitions of archeology and genealogy tend to link the former to discursive practices and the latter to systems of power-knowledge, in the last years of his life Foucault nevertheless refers to—and redefines—archeology and genealogy as two complementary (and not mutually exclusive) aspects of his work, often blurring the clear-cut distinction between them.<sup>45</sup> In April 1983, for instance, Foucault describes *all* of his (past and current) work in terms of genealogy, making clear that "genealogy" no longer applies exclusively to the field of power-knowledge:

Three domains of genealogy are possible. First, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, we can say that in *GL* too Foucault is tracing a *genealogy* of the relations between the government of human beings and alethurgy in the form of subjectivity—one that, more explicitly than ever before, relies on the critical postulate of the non-necessity of all power. If it is true that Foucault's genealogies of power-knowledge mechanisms are always also

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<sup>42</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge* (1975).

<sup>43</sup> See Jeremy Carrette, "'Spiritual Gymnastics': Reflections on Michel Foucault's *On the Government of the Living* 1980 Collège de France Lectures," *Foucault Studies* 20 (2015), who argues that, in *GL*, "Foucault consciously moves back to the methods of archeology, to a discursive mode rather than continuing the genealogical—body and pastoral power—question in relation to Christianity" (281).

<sup>44</sup> As rightly emphasized, e.g., by Jean-Michel Landry, "Confession, Obedience, and Subjectivity: Michel Foucault's Unpublished Lectures *On the Government of the Living*," *Telos* 146 (2009). For some important remarks on the kind of genealogy that Foucault practices in *GL*, see Colin Gordon, "The Christian Art of Being Governed," *Foucault Studies* 20 (2015), 256-257.

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1984), 46.

<sup>46</sup> Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" [1983], in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1997), 262.

genealogies of the critical attitude,<sup>47</sup> it is only in *GL* that he explicitly situates, at the core of his methodology, the critical attitude as a theoretical-practical principle.

## CONCLUSION

At first, it is of course puzzling that the notions of alethurgy, regime of truth, and anarchoeology—the main conceptual and methodological innovations of *GL*<sup>48</sup>—do not play any role whatsoever in the second, third, and fourth volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. It is a fact, however, that the methodological and conceptual architecture underpinning Foucault's in-depth analysis of a series of early Christian authors (from Tertullian to Cassian) and practices (from baptism to penance and spiritual direction) in *GL* is nowhere to be found in the pages devoted to these same authors and topics in *Les aveux de la chair*. We know that Foucault wrote the final draft of the book between 1981 and 1982, and sent it to Gallimard in the fall of 1982. Should we simply conclude that, in the span of a couple of years, Foucault changed his mind? Should we argue that, in *GL* as in so many other of his Collège de France lecture courses, Foucault was just “experimenting,” and that the form that these analyses end up taking in *Les aveux de la chair* deserves to be considered as the “correct” one? Should we, as a consequence, dismiss *GL* as a more or less failed experiment, and only care about *Les aveux de la chair*?

I think that the answer to all these questions is no. Of course, I do not want to deny that Foucault, in his lectures at the Collège de France, often experiments with new ideas and concepts that he later decides to abandon. As he explains in *GL*, theoretical work for him “does not consist in establishing and fixing the set of positions on which [one] would stand and the supposedly coherent link between which would form a system,” but rather in “leaving the trace, in the most intelligible outline possible, of the movements by which [one is] no longer at the place where [one was] earlier” (*GV*, 74-75/*GL*, 76). This systematic refusal of a fixed methodological and conceptual structure defining his work, this need to continually transform his own theoretical positions, certainly characterizes Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France, but also more generally his books and other writings. It would therefore not be a “scandal” if Foucault just changed his mind between 1980 and 1982.

However, it seems safe to claim that this is not what happened. The continuities that I emphasized between *GL* and Foucault's study of the Greco-Roman care of the self and ancient *parrhesia* between 1982 and 1984, and the fact that Foucault already presents the main ideas of *Les aveux de la chair* (but without the methodological and conceptual apparatus of *GL*) in a seminar at the New York Institute for the Humanities in the fall of 1980,<sup>49</sup> clearly suggest that we should consider *Les aveux de la chair* and *GL* as parts of two

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<sup>47</sup> On this point, see Daniele Lorenzini, “On Possibilising Genealogy,” *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 9 January 2020.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Greg Hollin, “To Obey and to Tell,” *History of the Human Sciences* 29:1 (2016).

<sup>49</sup> See Michel Foucault, “Séminaire au New York Institute for the Humanities” [1980], Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fonds Michel Foucault (NAF 28730), box no. 40; to be published in *La généalogie du savoir moderne sur la sexualité*.

different, conceptually autonomous, research projects. On the one hand, we have the project of a history of sexuality, which now consists in a genealogy of the subject of desire that goes back not only to the emergence of the flesh in early Christianity<sup>50</sup> but also to Greco-Roman *aphrodisia*—instead of just focusing on the Middle Ages, as it was the case in the manuscript of *La chair et le corps*.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, we have the project of an anarcho-genealogical investigation of the government of self and others through truth, which Foucault had in a sense already inaugurated in 1978 with his analyses of governmentality and the critical attitude, but which—in an analogous fashion—no longer just focuses on Medieval pastoral power and counter-conducts but goes back to the complex interplay between (alethurgic) techniques of coercion and of the self in early Christianity and Greco-Roman antiquity. This project connects *GL* to the last three lecture courses at the Collège de France, but it is also crucial to understand some of the main lecture cycles that Foucault delivers in the 1980s outside of France—from *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self* and *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*<sup>52</sup> to *Speaking the Truth about Oneself*,<sup>53</sup> *Technologies of the Self*,<sup>54</sup> and *Discourse and Truth*. And we now know that Foucault was collecting materials precisely from these lectures in view of the publication of a monograph, *The Government of Self and Others*, which he was planning on publishing with Seuil, independently from the *History of Sexuality* series.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, if Senellart is certainly right in claiming that *GL* is “the first course for a long time in which the material is inscribed within the perspective of a future book,” although “nothing in the general organization of the course gave the least indication to his audience of this connection between the oral teaching and the resumption of the project of the *History of Sexuality*,”<sup>56</sup> we should be very cautious and *avoid* concluding that, “although the vocabulary of sexuality—desire, libido, flesh, concupiscence, etcetera—does not appear at any point in the course, it is quite clearly inscribed in the framework of the general problematic of *Les aveux de la chair*.”<sup>57</sup> In a book chapter published in 2013, Senellart even more strongly argues that Foucault’s analyses in *GL* “do not only overlap, by certain themes, with the domain of the history of sexuality,” but “constitute an essential part of this history and must therefore be read in light of the general project outlined in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* and reoriented in *Les aveux de la chair*.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Whereas, in the mid-1970s, Foucault still linked the “birth of the flesh” to the post-Tridentine Christian pastorate of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See “Cours de São Paulo.”

<sup>51</sup> See Michel Foucault, “La chair et le corps,” Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fonds Michel Foucault (NAF 28730), boxes no. 87-89.

<sup>52</sup> Michel Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice* [1981] (2014).

<sup>53</sup> Michel Foucault, *Dire vrai sur soi-même: Conférences prononcées à l’Université Victoria de Toronto, 1982* (2017).

<sup>54</sup> Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* [1982] (1988).

<sup>55</sup> See Michel Foucault, “Le gouvernement de soi et des autres,” Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fonds Michel Foucault (NAF 28730), boxes no. 72-74. On this point, see Elden, *Foucault’s Last Decade*, 162-163.

<sup>56</sup> Senellart, “Situation du cours,” 335 / “Course Context,” 336.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 348 / 344.

<sup>58</sup> Michel Senellart, “Le cours *Du gouvernement des vivants* dans la perspective de *l’Histoire de la sexualité*,” in *Michel Foucault: Éthique et vérité (1980-1984)*, ed. Daniele Lorenzini, Ariane Revel, and Arianna Sforzini (2013), 32.

As I hope to have shown in this paper, this is not quite right: instead of reading *GL* in light of *Les aveux de la chair*, we should consider them as parts of two different—and relatively independent<sup>59</sup>—projects. It may even be possible to completely reverse Senellart’s conclusion and interpret (at least some aspects of) the second, third, and fourth volumes of the *History of Sexuality* in light of the project of an anarcho-genealogical investigation of the government of self and others through truth as defined in *GL*.<sup>60</sup> After all, in the fall of 1980, Foucault himself claims that he would like “in years to come to study government—especially in the field of sexuality—starting from the techniques of the self.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Of course, these two projects are not entirely unconnected, as they both explore the multiple forms taken by the relation between subjectivity and truth in the history of our society, thus jointly contributing to tracing the genealogy of the modern subject.

<sup>60</sup> For two attempts in this direction, see Daniele Lorenzini, “The Emergence of Desire: Notes Toward a Political History of the Will,” *Critical Inquiry* 45:2 (2019), 465-470 and Bernard E. Harcourt, “Foucault’s Keystone: *Confessions of the Flesh*. How the Fourth and Final Volume of *The History of Sexuality* Completes Foucault’s Critique of Modern Western Societies,” *SSRN*, 30 November 2019.

<sup>61</sup> *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self*, 26 (emphasis added).

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